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# HER EYES

Her Eyes Thesis Paper

By Stephanie Clark

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Film and Animation

School of Film and Animation

College of Imaging Arts and Sciences

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

July 28<sup>th</sup> 2017

## Committee Approval

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<b>Atia Newman</b> [Committee Chair] Professor School of Film and Animation	Date
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<b>Cat Ashworth</b> [Committee Advisor] Professor School of Film and Animation	Date
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<b>Mark Reisch</b> [Committee Advisor] Professor School of Film and Animation	Date
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# Acknowledgments

Before I dive into the specifics of my journey through the making of this film, there are some key people I would like to thank for their assistance and unyielding support through the thesis process.

Firstly, I need to thank my thesis advisor, trusted friend, supervisor, and partial therapist, and Assistant Professor at RIT, Atia Newman. Since the early beginnings of my academic career at RIT, Atia, saw something in me and refused to let me give up on myself. She was always there to answer a question, to calm me down when crisis hit, and to keep me on track through the good and the bad of this whole process. Even though, I struggled with several issues through the process of making this film, Atia was there to lend a caring ear, and give me guidance as my mentor and trusted friend. She was always ready to help me conquer the narrow twists and turns that my path took and always there to give helpful advice or prompt me with new ideas while still respecting my creative freedom through the process. Without her, I know that this film would not have made it into production or have been possible without her expert advice and support.

I also want to thank Cat Ashworth and Mark Reisch, the two other members of my thesis committee and trusted professors at RIT, for their supportive guidance and patience through the two years it has taken me to complete my film. The two of them kept me on task, and brought wonderful insight into the difficult subject matter and technical challenges of combining animation and live action. Each brought their own skills to the table and advised me on the best directions to push my film

to bring in another level of depth and craft to my work. Without the two of them pushing me to try different techniques, test my limits, or change my story around, my film would be a shell of the personal and emotional piece that it eventually came to be.

Lastly, I need to thank my family, friends, and colleagues for their help and continued support through the last two years. As this project became my life, my passion, my anxiety, and my downfall at times, they were there to help pick up the pieces and put me back together. When times were rough, they were there to help support me and push me through. They were there to celebrate with me and kept me motivated to press on.

To all of the wonderful people who have supported, helped, guided, and cheered for me through the process of this great achievement in my academic and artistic career, thank you; from the bottom of my heart, I thank you.

# Abstract

*Her Eyes* is an animated graduate thesis film that is 13 minutes and 25 seconds in length. Through the course of the film, the audience witnesses several years of the main character, Sam Peterson's, daily life as he suffers from Alzheimer's disease. As Sam continues to try and live his life unaffected by the disease, he comes to the realization that his sole dependent, Helen, his granddaughter, has changed roles from being under his care, to his sole caretaker. From this realization, Sam comes to the harsh decision to protect his granddaughter's future, valuing the time in which he can remember her over the length of his lifespan.

*Her Eyes* is a combination of 3D animation, live action, with elements of 2D VFX animation. The majority of the animation was created using Maya, with visual effects created in After Effects and TVPaint.

This paper will take you through the creation of *Her Eyes*, from the films' initial concept creation, to story-boarding, to the production and post-production processes as well as the debut showing of the film to the public. As a reader, you will delve into the challenges, difficulties, and personal battles I faced in creating this film, and how I eventually overcame them to finish the film and step out into the world of film-making as a more confident and skilled animator and director.



# Introduction

*Her Eyes* began in May of 2014 and was completed May of 2017 in partial fulfillment of my Masters of Fine Arts degree at the Rochester Institute of Technology. The original idea of *Her Eyes* was something that started off as a cyclical film that would give the audience a first-person view of the life of someone with Alzheimer's disease. The same scene would repeat over and over again, slowly deconstructing itself as the film progressed. First the scene would use live actors and a full set, but then, slowly would change as piece of the set and actors would transition from live action, to 3D animation, to 2D animation, to abstract animation, and then finally to pitch black, where the sound would completely distort till the film ended. After pitching my idea to the committee and much discussion, I reconsidered this concept and chose to apply a different approach to my filmmaking process. I settled on a linear story that combined the visual elements I sought but with a cohesive storyline that took the audience through a condensed version of several years of a person's life. The film taught me valuable skills in scriptwriting, 3D modeling, editing, post-production, compositing. This process gave me the experience of directing my first live action piece as well as more experience of working on a film set. It also gave me the ability to refine my skills in storytelling, story-boarding, and preproduction.

From the beginning of *Her Eyes* there were two main things I wanted to accomplish with the creation of the film. Firstly, I wanted to polish my skills as a storyteller. I wanted to tell the story of someone with Alzheimer's disease, in a way that people could see the effect of the disease on the individual patient and how the disease affects the world and people around them. I wanted to find a way to tell

a story that was inherently meaningful based on my personal experience with the disease but something that the audience could connect with on more than a surface level. In order to effectively achieve this, I needed to write strong characters and create a story that touched people's hearts. I found new ways of showing the audience what I wanted them to learn through creative camera angles, and experimenting with different visual styles instead of relying heavily on dialogue and over acting. Looking back on this process, I feel that the live action scenes could have used some more work refining the dialogue but that my animation scenes worked well with the structure I had created.

Secondly, I wanted to effectively mix several mediums together. I feel that the film as a whole greatly benefits from the blending of live action and 3D animation. The mixed mediums add a new level of depth to the film allowing the audience to visually see the destruction of the main character and how the disease took its toll on his mentality. In scenes where Sam Peterson is of clear mind, he remained a live action actor but will flicker back and forth between 3D as his thoughts become unstable until he ultimately succumbed to the disease. In his peak moment of confusion he was entirely immersed in an imaginary world of 3D.

One of the biggest challenges of this project was trying to complete this film within the original planned timeline. The production faced many unexpected challenges and interruptions that required me to push the completion date back several times. Some of the unfortunate hurdles ranged from funding loss, lack of crew, the disappearances of my actors, and the unfortunate end of a long-term relationship amongst other, smaller challenges. Through the course of this project, my deadline was pushed a whole year from May 2016 to May 2017. These

complications challenged me to adapt rapidly and find creative solutions to convoluted and seemingly impossible problems while relying on those around me to help bring insight through the trials of my production.

## **Backstory**

My relationship with my grandfather was a strange one to explain. I lived my life a second-class citizen to my grandfather, on the sole basis that I was a girl. In his eyes, females were meant to grow up and become house wives. My mother, realizing the flaws in his thinking, raised my three sisters and I to be independent and strong-willed women. Though I still participated in stereotypical feminine roles, such as singing and dancing, I lived my life rolling around in mud, playing sports and video games like all the boys in my area did. The idea of a tomboy grandchild made visits with my mother's parents awkward, when they came over on the rare occasion. Conversations with my grandfather were short and to the point. Dinner was... functional at best, and in the remaining time my grandfather spent in my childhood home was mostly used to chat with my parents or jokingly threaten to pick me up by my ears or steal my nose; mere pleasantries, nothing more.

This casual and distant relationship continued undisturbed for many years until I eventually graduated with a Bachelor of Science and was considering whether to pursue a Master's degree. My grandfather, whom had never taken much interest in my academics, eagerly brought up my continuing education. I was ecstatic. My extended family rarely took an interest in my academics and to ask question after question about my plans made it seem like someone genuinely took

an interest in the world of animation and film besides myself. Once I left for school and came back for the holidays, I eagerly awaited to talk with my family about my progress and the films I was creating. He once again asked questions about my art and how I enjoyed school. At the time, he slipped up the name of my school, but it didn't bother me at all. Finally, I thought, I was getting somewhere in my relationship with him.

Fast forward to the following Christmas. My family was once again gathered for our routine holiday festivities, and my grandfather brought up my schooling. This time however, he had forgotten that I was already in school for my Master's, confusing my school with my undergraduate one. These little moments, what I once thought were slips of the tongue, were the first signs that his mind was deteriorating; I had no idea.

With another passing year, his memory had gotten worse. My moments of excitement to discuss my progress turned sour as my grandfather developed into the later stages of Alzheimer's disease, relentlessly repeating phrases and forgetting moments that had just passed in the blink of an eye. The joy I had of thinking I was developing a relationship with my grandfather, was in truth, just the beginning of his demise. Some part of me felt responsible for not noticing the subtle changes in his behavior, and took it personally when his diagnosis was worse than we imagined. Those feelings bore hole in my chest that was invisible to my family. During our family dinners and my routine meetings with my grandparents, I sat there, eyes devoid of any emotion as I tried to wrap my head around how my family continued on with daily life. I had, in my mind, already experienced my grandfather's death and was in mourning.



*Figure 1: My grandparents on my Mother's side*

## **Pre-Production**

### *Story Development*

During my Thesis Preparation course, I struggled with creating ideas that would capture my attention for a year, and that seemed doable within my limited time and budget. I had grand ideas of longer films that were primarily animation but would have no chance of being completed given my short year for production. I tried my best to condense some of my grander ideas but to no avail. Instead, my classmates pushed me to pursue an idea I had haphazardly mentioned during a moment of frustration; a cyclical film about someone dying of Alzheimer's disease. I had given the idea some thought but was worried that the content of the film would be too dry for audiences or too difficult to capture with my current skill. In my mind, the idea that I would make a film about someone dying of a disease that personally affected my life made it all the more painful to approach. I wrote up the treatment and buried my feelings in the bottom drawer of my mind. It wasn't until my film was discussed further during my proposal committee that I suddenly realized how much the film would cost me on an emotional level.

I began my preparation soon after my meeting, contacting my family members for information about the disease, nearby hospitals, and the local Alzheimer's Association for more information, and researched anything I could for my film. I wrote and rewrote my film, trying to stay within the circular structure I had created in my head. I ran into problem after problem, lacking character development, pointless actions and a film that didn't ring true to what I had envisioned.

Through my research into Alzheimer's, I came across article after article about the suicide rate of Alzheimer's patients<sup>1</sup>, cases of mistreatment in nursing homes and care centers, families being torn apart over DNRs (Do Not Resuscitate forms)<sup>2</sup> and End-of-Life care plans.<sup>3</sup> Healthcare activists wanted to bring the power back to victims and patients with degenerative and terminal diseases by instating an act of legislature entitled the Death with Dignity Act<sup>4</sup>. When passed, would allow terminal patients to be given the option to partake in physician assisted suicide. Cases had been cropping up all over the web, referencing cancer patients or those with serious degenerative diseases. One thing rang true through the majority of articles; those who were in these articles were considered "terminal". According to the National Board of Health, in order for a patient to be considered "terminal", their expected lifespan was to be anything six months or less.<sup>5</sup> What about Alzheimer's patients? The disease varied in degrees of speed, some patients could take months to pass, and others could live years before finally succumbing to the side effects of the disease. These articles and stories sat in the back of my

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert 2014

<sup>2</sup> New York State Department of Health DNR Order Form 2013

<sup>3</sup> National Institute on Aging 2015

<sup>4</sup> Death with Dignity Updated 2017

<sup>5</sup> Mayo Clinic 2015

mind as I continued to revise and rip apart my script. Through the process, I still struggled with the idea of my grandfather dying slowly and painfully in a nursing home, not remembering who any of his family was.

It was in the understanding of his mortality that I began to change my mind about my idea. Instead of having a first-person perspective of the disease, why not see the full scope, and give the person the right to die when they wanted? It was then, where *Her Eyes* began to take shape. My main character, Sam Peterson, would change his fate, and life of his granddaughter by choosing to die by his own hand, honoring their relationship and her dedication to his memory and care throughout the process.

## *Funding*

During the summer following my proposal, I was in contact with the local Alzheimer's Association. I had walked into the office around the corner of my apartment and chatted with a lovely woman who served as a counselor for the association. She directed me to the local library and was more than willing to help set me up with some of the therapy groups that the organization hosted. It was a great opportunity to talk with patients, caretakers, and other families to get a firsthand account of the symptoms and how peoples' attitudes and actions changed with the disease. The organization was thoroughly pleased that a young aspiring filmmaker wanted to represent the disease in its entirety, without all the stigma and melodramatics of high-end Hollywood films. After several discussions and emails between the regional director, counselors, and myself, the topic of my script was brought up. The association wanted to look at the script and have input

in exchange for the possibility of funding for my thesis. I was ecstatic. I had finally gotten my script to a point where I thought the idea was coming through and would ring true with audiences. I handed the most recent draft over to the association. Sadly, they were less than pleased. A few years back, a distinguished professor was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and followed a similar path to my character, and took her own life.<sup>6</sup> I explained my situation and my reasoning for my script decision. I followed my own beliefs that these options should be something discussed and thought about with Alzheimer's patients. The organization had different opinions. I was given an ultimatum: change the script to fit with the views of the organization and receive applicable funding for my film; or lose support and entirely.

By this point, I was so determined to bring this issue to light, there was no question about my decision. I gathered my things and left the office, never to return again. I had received an email shortly afterward, once again giving me the option to change my film for the funding I required; and once again, I declined. I would move forward without funding from the association.

As luck would have it, there was a wonderful opportunity to receive funding from within the School of Film and Animation. In the beginning of my second year of production on *Her Eyes*, I was forwarded an email from my thesis committee members about a grant that could help supplement the cost of my film. The Callahan-Rennalls Production grant is a grant that Tim Callahan gives in honor of a former faculty member Martin Rennalls who taught at RIT from 1972 to 1985. I wrote a letter describing my idea and the potential social impacts of the act that I

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<sup>6</sup> Henig 2015



was supporting with my film. After a few months of waiting and continuing work on my film, I received news that I had been awarded 300\$ towards the completion my thesis. The sum wasn't as substantial as the original offer from the Alzheimer's Association, but that didn't matter. I was more excited that someone saw merit in my work and the Death with Dignity act that I stood for, rather than pushing their own agenda. The grant was more than enough to help me pay back some of the expenses for my film.

### *The Actors*

In the early weeks of the summer after my proposal, I set out to find a man who could perfectly capture my idea of Sam Peterson, the lead role in my film. I spent time visiting the senior center in Henrietta, NY just a short drive from my house. I spoke to many of the visitors but was quickly pushed aside. Very few people wanted to give time to a student film; especially one that touched upon a subject that affected many of their friends and loved ones. I gave details about my film and how important it was to me and the changes it could bring but I saw little response from the people I approached for assistance. I was allowed to hang flyers on the bulletin board in the main lobby and left to find help online. I browsed through the catalogue of actors used in other RIT films, but found that these actors overacted in their roles or had been cast in SOFA films so frequently that I couldn't stand to use them. I needed an actor that hadn't been seen before by the RIT community. I didn't necessarily need a great actor but rather someone who could capture the role I was looking for without needing to be paid a large sum of money. I posted ads anywhere I could, Facebook, Craigslist, actor resources and groups. I

eventually just posted an ad for an open audition and waited. It seemed that many live action students had good results with open auditions and had no issues getting cast and crew together for their projects. I was not so lucky. I sat alone in a room with printouts of my script for hours, waiting for an email, phone call, or someone to walk in waiting to play the role of Sam or any character for my film.

Hours felt like days and for one whole weekend I sat alone in a room wondering where I gone wrong in my search for actors. As I sat there, checking my email for the nth time, I got a hit on my Craigslist ad. "I saw your post and would like to try out for the role of Sam. I have been in a film before. It is on Hulu." I was filled with hope. Not only did I have someone who wanted to act in my film, but they were already in a film on Hulu! I looked over the film quickly and emailed back asking to meet. After a brief discussion at a local coffee shop, I had secured my main actor – John Curtis.



Figure 2: John Curtis on set

Finding the actress to play Helen, Sam's granddaughter, came shortly after my initial meeting with John. I got a hit on my Craigslist ad again and met with a young actress named Hannah Pisher. She auditioned almost a week after I met John. I was pleased with her performance and acting skill and ability to improvise. She had experience in stage acting but needed some coaching to work in a film setting. I offered her the position immediately and set up the time for her to meet John and discuss the roles. We read over the script and had a table read the following weekend.

### *Script Development*

The script for *Her Eyes* took on many different forms over the course of the film's creation. The original script focused more on the character development of Helen, Sam's granddaughter and how the disease affected her through the remainder of her grandfather's life. Since I had never really written a script for a film before, I spent time acting out each part, trying to understand the characters and how their personalities and pathos would change their interpretations of situations and dialogue.

Once I had the general concept for the narrative structure completed. I spent time working with my actors doing table reads. We spent a total of 8 hours doing table reads through the first drafts of the script, picking apart dialogue that didn't quite fit the scene and replacing bits that seemed to be more in line with what the characters' personalities determined. My actors helped guide me through dialogue and actions that seemed too staged or over exaggerated. As an

animator, I found that I planned out a lot of the characters' movement through scenes, which was very limiting for my actors when working through the script. Through the process of table reads, this changed and I was able to release more creative control over the scenes to the actors once we rehearsed the dialogue and determined the key points and actions.

The final script of *Her Eyes* was more relaxed and left more to the imagination of the audience. It focused more on Sam's experience with Alzheimer's and less on his granddaughter's reaction. The end result, left me with a script that was more mature and refined, allowing for mixed interpretation of the film's ending and a more experimental narrative with varying visual styles and the exploration of different motifs that could seamlessly be woven into the storyline. The dialogue was more limited but left room for the actors and the film to breathe and create meaning with heavy moments of tension and silence on screen.

### *Visual Development*

During the first semester, I had begun writing the script for my film but knew that in order for the live action to work with the 3D animated character, I needed to have a storyboard and animatic completed before anything else was put into production. My 3D animation, character, and props would all be completely dependent on my lead actor and live action sets. After much deliberation and adjustment of the script, I decided to use my own apartment to shoot the film. That also meant that I would need to recreate my lead actor and my entire apartment in 3D.

With a film that is almost completely based in reality, there was very little room for dramatic designs of the characters or the scenes. I chose a design where the character model looked realistic but the texturing and lighting would allow for some creative leeway that would keep my animation away from the pitfalls of early hyperrealism in 3D called the “uncanny valley”. The uncanny valley is the idea that human replicas which appear almost, but not exactly, like real human beings. They elicit feelings of eeriness and are considered somewhat repulsive to observers. Through my artistic choices, and the distinct lack of hyper-realistic texturing and shading, the audience would be disoriented and slightly disturbed by the animated scenes during Sam’s disillusionments but not perturbed to the point of disgust. In order to achieve this effect, I needed to realistically recreate my actor and the sets we used for the live action segments.

To limit my need for modeling many scenes and sets, I decided that the story would take place almost entirely inside within Sam’s apartment. That decision limited the amount of sets I needed to model so that I could focus on the story and animation. At that time, I lived in a fully furnished apartment with two bedrooms, I was able to create a set in the spare room that would be used for the live action section of the film. Once I had decided the scenes and filming space, I moved onto the animatic.

## *Animatic*

My first pass of storyboards made perfect sense in my head and my committee enjoyed how they told the story visually. However, once I brought my boards into Premiere and created my first animatic, I realized the difference between an animated piece and a live action one. My first animatic was heavy in pauses and subtle acting that I could emphasize with more shots and music, but after further analysis, it was so melodramatic, that the scenes became laughable with my pauses and over-the-top musical choices. My thesis advisor, Atia Newman, and I looked over the boards again, and decided to focus on what could be done in a physical space for the live action scenes and leave the action somewhat vague so that my actors could interpret the characters how they wanted. I was able to leave in key transitions and movements but the dialogue and pacing would be determined a lot by the acting and shots I could physically accomplish when on set. My idea was getting across, and the characters were worked and reworked through the storyboarding process until we settled on what seemed to be a workable animatic that would serve as a great base for my live action.

Blending live action and animation took careful consideration when planning out the necessary shots for the filming. Normally, one would have a Visual Effects Supervisor to advise the director to ensure the effects are given ample consideration in the way a scene is composed or shot. In my case, I had a trusted cinematographer and friend, Matt Ansini, help me determine what was possible with the limited space within my apartment. We looked over the storyboards frame by frame and discussed how the transitions would work with the technology we had available to us. Matt and I reworked the storyboards and animatic,

transitioning it into 3D using the models and 3D apartment I had created. We were able to effectively create a working animatic, using the same lenses and focal lengths that we eventually needed while shooting the live action. We took copious notes on what was possible and what shots needed careful framing for effects and finalized the animatic for my advisor's approval.

### *Filming Prep*

While working on the 3D animatic with Matt, we also spent time coaching my actors and doing table reads with the revised script. This step was vital in breaking down the script and understanding the characters' motivations for their actions and how the actors would depict the characters. We spent several sessions with the actors, going over each part of the script, line by line, breaking down the emotions and possible moment choices for the actors to follow. After I was satisfied with the actors' vocal performance, we moved onto blocking out scenes.

Matt and I spent two days with the actors, practicing blocking and rehearsing lines with imaginary cameras to give the actors the best idea of what I was looking for. We showed the actors the animatic and how the movement would be planned out so that the animation and live action had a seamless transition. After several hours of working and reworking actor placement and line emphasis, we settled on a version of blocking that worked with both the actors' skill and read well for the film. Once that step was complete, we moved onto production.

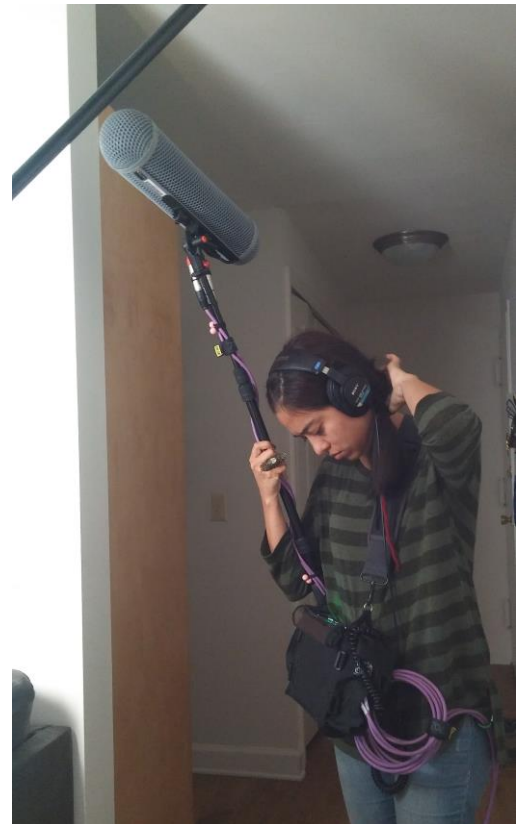
# Production

## *Filming*

The filming process for *Her Eyes* proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. Though I had properly reached out to the live action community, finding a crew to help work my film was a difficult and incredibly frustrating process. I had two people I relied on heavily, Matt Ansini and my good friend Vicky Yepes, both RIT Film and Animation alumni, to help me.

Other than that, I struggled to fill the missing places for my crew positions. Most of my crew joined my team as favors owed to my friends. Other than that, finding any crew by myself was hard to come by.

The first day of filming was a learning experience for everyone. I, myself, had never directed a live action film before, and it was a challenge for my small crew of five people and equipment to fit in the narrow confines of my humble apartment. It was also my female actor's



*Figure 3: Vicky on Set*

first time acting in a film. All of these circumstances made the whole process a bumpy road, but we managed to navigate through it. The day moved slowly. By the end of day one of filming we had only completed two scenes of the four that were planned. I was upset but still hopeful for the second day of filming.



I awoke to a phone call at 11pm from Matt. The crew that I was relying on for the next day of filming had all called off for one reason or another. A few were sick from staying up too late, others were struggling to balance their classwork with their filming obligations and had to give up the later. This left just Matt, his assistant cameraman, Michael Tellup, (in training at the time) and myself. I begrudgingly canceled day two of filming and hoped to reschedule for the following week.

Soon I was reserving the equipment for the second attempt at filming. As I was putting my name down on the checkout sheet, I received notification that one of my actors wouldn't be able to make the shoot. As quickly as I had received her message, I scribbled my name out on the sheet and emailed my crew of the cancellation. After a string of emails back and forth between my actors, Matt and myself, I had given up trying to complete the live action work for the fall semester and I dove into my 3D work. Matt had his own thesis to work on during the rest of the semester and I was busy trying to get the 3D animation work done.

The winter came and so did a new semester. February hit, and my crew and I were ready to attempt a third try at filming. After begging and pleading with people, we managed to scrape together a crew of four for the two days of that weekend. It wasn't optimal, but it sufficed for the time being. We worked tirelessly through the day, pushing both the crew and actors to their limits. Even with the forced motivation, we only managed half of the scenes I had originally planned. The day came and went, and Matt and I prepared for following day of shooting which was supposed to be our last.

The fourth day of shooting came with a plethora of laughable situations. My crew was beyond minimal, three people showed up, my actors were fighting colds and/or stomach problems, and I was running on little to no sleep from staying up to prepare for filming. When everyone arrived at my apartment, the room was filled with an all-or-nothing attitude that permeated the walls. We faced every problem



Figure 4: The crew from the 2nd day of filming

one by one, with the kind of grace and determination one wouldn't normally expect from student filmmakers. When the day finally came to a close, we had managed to shoot all of the remaining scenes I had planned for and had moved all of the furniture around to reassemble the apartment. With a great sigh of relief, Matt and I began the daunting task of compiling the footage and syncing the sound so that I could begin the editing process.

In order to save time modeling, one of my thesis committee members and trusted professors, Mark Reisch, mentioned a new

product in beta testing by Autodesk called Memento (now called ReMake).<sup>7</sup> Memento was developed to be a solution for converting photos or scans of real life objects into HD 3D meshes. The software allowed for the creation, editing, and cleanup of these meshes so that they could be incorporated into various projects.

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<sup>7</sup> Autodesk ReMake 2015

At the time, Memento had very few videos that demonstrated the program's capabilities. I watched several tech demos on the product and read through the website to try and get a better understanding of how to use the software. The idea was simple: Have your scene or object in a stationary position and take photos while keeping the camera a set distance away from the object(s) as you circled around your subject multiple times. Then, once the first initial passes were complete, the camera could be moved in to capture more detail. During one of the many table reads I did with my actors, I took the opportunity to ask John to stay a little later so I could capture the reference photos I needed to test out Memento. In total, I captured 173 photos of John, with his arms outstretched standing in the grass outside of my apartment complex. I spent almost 20 minutes circling him with my camera, trying to capture as much detail about him as I could from the various

001.rcm - Memento Beta



*Figure 5: First Memento Attempt*

angles. I was happy with how the photos came out. They were clear, and John was pretty well separated from the background, so it seemed like the process of creating the models in Memento would be an easy task.

I sat down at my computer and proceeded to paste all of my images into the program and clicked away. The program took its time uploading the photos to the Autodesk website

but I didn't mind the wait – thinking that I would have a wonderful fully modeled character in a few short hours. The program processed the images and created the 3D model. I opened the link and found my work had created something less than desirable. From nearly two hundred photos, I ended up with a misshapen human that looked more like a McDonald's chicken nugget than anything close to a human form. I tried the process again after rearranging the images to what I assumed to be a better order but to no avail. A third and fourth time resulted in the same nugget-like human but with varying noodles of extremities in random placements all over the main body.

A week passed and I had managed to find very little information about my mishap in Memento. Many people had issues with the program but no one seemed to have difficulties with humans turning into nuggets. I laughed at the whole experience and tried something else with the program. I decided that I would try capturing my apartment and using the program to model my furniture for me. For nearly an hour and a half, I wandered around my apartment taking photos of everything I owned. I stood in the middle of all of my rooms and spun around in circles trying to capture the likeness of my apartment to the best of my ability. I uploaded the photos once again to Autodesk's site and watched the numbers flutter up and down, slowly calculating the beauty of my apartment and creating the most perfect recreation of my home. At least, that was what was supposed to happen. The file returned to me as a 3D marble, but hints of colors that I found throughout my living room and bedroom. I could identify cabinets and shapes of things that appeared in my apartment, but there was a disturbing amount of deformity. I went to the online forums and looked for possible answers. According to many users, Memento disliked working with white walls and used the white as a

positive space, pushing the walls before many objects and making it very difficult to get an accurate read of a room. My apartment didn't allow for the walls to be painted, so I was stuck with blank, white walls that caused all sorts of confusion within Memento. Once I had confirmed that the white walls caused the issues, I moved forward to modeling in Maya.

Over the next few weeks I painstakingly created an exact replica of my apartment and all of the furniture I owned. I measured every wall and almost every object that would be within view of the camera at any given time. Once the models for the apartment were complete, I moved onto modeling my actor. Using the reference photos from my failed Memento experience, I modeled my actor using the traditional box method in Maya. I worked with the model for several weeks, going through many reviews of the topology and checking the quality of the mesh for deformation purposes. I had completed the model with clothing that would be parented to the model's rig.

### *Rigging*

Once I had created the models in Maya, I began the process of rigging and testing the stability of my character model. I had purchased an auto-rigger to help me through the process of creating a stable rig with ease. Though, after some trial and error, I ended up relying on the expertise of a good friend of mine and recent 3D animation grad, Cameron McKenzie, to help me finalize the rig and ensure that all of the controls that I had created worked well. He had used this auto-rigger in his own film with great results with the animation and controls. We spent time Skyping and emailing back and forth; trying to work out the best way to utilize the

rigger and what poses my character model would need to achieve before we set on weight painting.

Cameron was kind enough to get me started on the weight painting, leaving me with little to do in regards to dealing with the construction of the final rig. Once the rig came back to me I cleaned up the weights on the joints. Halfway through the process, I realized that my rig wouldn't be able to deform properly given the way the geometry was laid out. So, I went back into the mesh and corrected some poorly planned topology and began the rigging and paint weighting process over again. This carried on for several more iterations of the character model of my actor, adjusting and readjusting the topology that seemed out of place and re-rigging when necessary. Eventually, I managed to find a script to be able to help me go through and select skin weights and transfer them from previous iterations of my mesh. This saved a large amount of time in the long run, and proved to be very useful when working with the in-progress rig. When the rig seemed in good working order I began the texturing process.

## *Texturing*

Once the rig was completed and the topology was finalized, I unwrapped my character mesh with Maya and began creating the textures for the model. At this point in the process, I had not finalized the look of the 3D world. So, I chose to use photo-realistic textures by pulling samples from the photographs I had taken of my actor and applying them to the texture file. At first, I was happy with the result of the realistic textures; but after talking things over with Atia and my other committee

members, I chose to scrap the idea and actively choose and create a stylized coloring scheme to use for the models.

While creating a style for the film I became inspired by another film “Meet Buck” which had a very stylized coloring technique that mimicked 2D vector animations. I tried my best to replicate that feeling of vectors and matte painting in my technique but with enough differences so that when I ultimately chose to color correct the film, and desaturate the textures I had created, the film would have a strong contrast and unique style.

### *Beginning Animation*

I had begun working on the animation section of the film while I was still in the process of finishing my 3D animatic. Since I was waiting to complete the live action segments through most of the first semester, I pushed ahead with the animation to bridge the time gap. In order to create realistic looking movement and to maintain the acting from my actor, I used reference from the first few days of filming as well as from our initial blocking before we shot anything. As I worked my way through my animatic, I found that I didn't capture as much reference as I needed and ended up improvising with some of my own acting during parts of the climax of the film. After several takes and angles, I went ahead and began the blocking process for the animation. I started with key poses set to step intervals, so I could see the timing without being hindered by extra movement. Since I was already a semester behind and wanted to graduate in December, I went through the animation matching my reference as closely as I could.

## *Animation Problems*

Once I had completed the blocking for the majority of my animated scenes, I began breaking down the animation. While working on breakdowns, I still kept the animation stepped, so that way I could work on the overall timing and the fluidity of the movement. While beginning to refine the animation, I started having issues with my rig. Simple movements took much longer than expected and Maya would have issues playing anything back in the program. Moving and setting simple key frames or going into the graph editor to adjust animation curves took nearly 2 minutes for simple adjustments.

I called on Cameron again to help me get to the root of my animation issues. We dove into the rig and started to dissect the problems. My mesh didn't appear very heavy from a quick glance so I didn't understand why Maya had so many issues evaluating the topology. Despite the continuing issues, I struggled through the animation and tried as best I could to work with the mesh the way it was. After a few weeks, Cam and I discovered the root cause of my issue. Over the course of my film, I had to upgrade to the latest version of Maya because our school upgrades their version almost every semester. I had to match their version to be able to keep working between home and school. Somewhere along the way, the mesh I had been working with had created a null node, an empty container, which started to collect information. With each version of Maya I upgraded, the null node collected more and more copies of my character and had added it to the overall size of my rig. So, by the most recent version of Maya, I was using a rig that was over 8x the size of the original one. Since I was referencing the rig in my



various scenes, this compounded the effects of the heavy rig, making it almost impossible to work with in normal situations.

Sadly, I couldn't start over with a new rig. I was already in the process of animating my shots and couldn't change rigs without losing all of my data. So, Cam and I did the best we could, based on the troublesome situation. We took the current rig down, removed any extra meshes that were hidden by clothing and re-rigged the character from the bottom up. The result was a lighter rig, with a new set of skin weights that needed to be adjusted and re-textured. It was frustrating, but the rig was light and easily moved when working, and that was all that mattered.

The time it took to work and rework the rig pushed me back another semester. By the time the rig was properly calibrated and back up and running, the spring semester had already begun. It became a sprint to the finish to get the animation and visual effects done.

# Post-Production

## *Rendering and Editing*

Through my thorough pre-production process and multiple animatics, I gave myself a great base for my film in its timing and pacing. I was fortunate to have completed the bulk of my editing immediately after shooting my live action sequences. My timeline was just about set when I had started my animation. In the last few weeks of the semester all I needed to do was drop in my animation after it was rendered and place my visual effects on top of all the layers.

Since I was on a tight deadline, I found myself rendering while I was completing the animation and visual effects. I reorganized my entire thesis folder system for quick editing and review. I had my laptop set up so that I could place new footage into my timeline and my desktop was set my workhorse for animating and compositing. I multitasked the majority of my waking hours so that I was always working on something related to my thesis. If I wasn't actively working on a shot, I was rendering my animation. If I was pulled away from thesis, I always made sure to have something transferring or rendering in the background. At night, I would take over one of the computer labs on campus and render my project while I toiled away on my laptop, finalizing my VFX and animation. At one point, I had become completely nocturnal, taking over almost 25 computers during the night so that I wouldn't disrupt classes with my rendering during the day.

To save on final storage size of my film, I exported the live action sequences as 1920 x 1080 instead of the 4K resolution that we shot the film at. This way, I wouldn't have to worry about resizing my frames once they were rendered to fit with the old resolution. It would also save me space on my hard drives with the animation renders. From this process I converted the 500GB of footage from filming to 275GB just by resizing and exporting my film at Full HD instead of 4K.

## *Compositing*

### *Particle Cloud*

One of the main effects for my film was a cloud of confusion and words. The idea behind the cloud was that it was a physical manifestation of Sam Peterson's thoughts and worries. Words relevant to what he was hearing or thinking would float above his head, obscuring his vision to the world around him. This also served a purpose to directing the audience to the words around the character's head instead of what was being said on screen. The final result would be something that enhanced Sam's confusion but aided the audience in their understanding of the dilemmas of an Alzheimer's patient.

The original concept was based on the visual representation of text data, known as word clouds, or tag clouds. They are usually used to depict keyword metadata or tags on websites. The importance of each tag is shown through the size and font color of each word. Since the initial use of tag clouds, the concept has taken off as another social art form, utilizing mapping to form tag clouds into shapes to create a deeper connection between the overarching ideas behind the

cloud. My idea, was to integrate this design element to give the audience a world cloud of Sam's mind but to also enhance visual confusion on screen.

Since the cloud wasn't meant to be a stationary object on screen, I needed to develop a cloud structure to adhere the words to as they pivoted around Sam's



Figure 6: Word Cloud Concept

head. In my first iteration, I created the cloud shape with green screen smoke footage I had found online. After using the effect in my current edit I found this proved to be too flat for the 3D effect I was going for. I reached out to a fellow graduate student Veenal D'Silvia, to assist in the development of the 3D cloud. He took the initial concept and created a 3D shapeshifting cloud with realistic textures and forms to be the base of my confusion cloud.



Figure 7: Final Cloud Effect

We settled on the cloud he had created and enhanced the idea by creating the words in the same way using the moving cloud texture to make the words

appear as smoke. The end result was a cloud with smoky words hovering around the Sam's head.

## Glitch Effect

The main effect in my film was the glitch effect that I used to flicker between the live action and animation. The concept was to have something similar to TV analog distortion overlaid on top of the live action footage so that the transition of the live action to animation would appear less jarring to the audience. After looking at various effect online, I couldn't find a particular version that I wanted to use. Instead, I was left to make my own.

The glitch effect that I created became a two-part sequence I created in After Effects. The first part of the effect distorted the animation. I used a preexisting glitch from an old VHS tape I found from my original web search. I overlaid the footage on the animation and used the negative space to replace the alpha channel of the animation. The end result was a series of blocky opacity changes on the animation with various holes cut through from the alpha channel of the glitch effect I used.

The second part of the glitch effect was applied to the live action footage. I recreated some of the TV glitches I had found online by creating ambient noise and applying a dust and scratches effect found within After Effects. I then animated the effect by adjusting the position and creating cut outs that would then change the shape of the effect on the footage. I used this same technique multiple times with different shapes to create the flickering and glitch effect that I was looking for.

Finally, after creating the two parts separately, I combined them together in one composition. I looked over the combined effect and overlaid one additional track of the noise and dust effect to finish up the glitch.

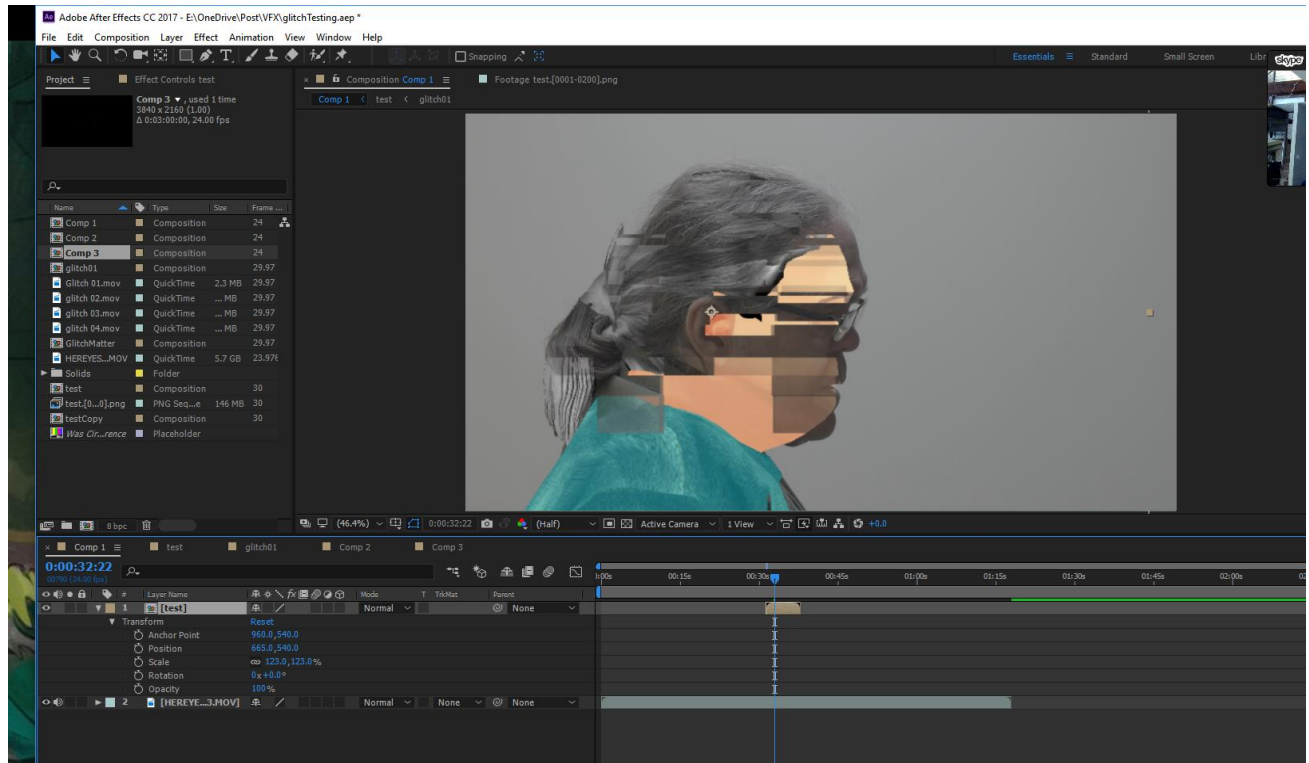


Figure 8: Glitch Progress

## Photo Transition

While developing the script of *Her Eyes*, I knew that I wanted there to be lapses in time between each scene. I wanted to show how Alzheimer's was destroying Sam Peterson's memories and show the passage of time all at once. Looking over my options, I wanted to avoid having to shoot new footage or to go with the stereotypical idea of a calendar flipping through the months. Originally, I decided that the film would use sticky notes and photographs on a wall to help

walk the audience through the people that my main character once valued as important. After some thought, I didn't want to introduce new characters in these transition moment. So instead, the idea was changed to childhood photos.

The transition scene started with the camera panning from left to right, to symbolize the idea of time moving forward. At the same point, the photos would be burning, the most damage done to the photos on far right of the screen, to symbolize the newest memories being destroyed first. I played around with this idea and chose to highlight the individual memories of Sam's life and the people he was close with rather than have one long shot. This saved both on compositing and rendering time in the long run.

In the final transition scenes of *Her Eyes* there are a total of 13 photo vignettes developed for the film, with a total of 19 images used. Each image sits in a pair or alone on a kitchen table as if someone was looking through a collection of photos. Halfway through the shot, the photos ignite and crumple to dust. In the last few seconds of the shot the embers and dust fade away to nothingness. I felt that this way of approaching the destruction of memories was less literal and gave the audience a chance to try and connect with the memories and photos before they were extinguished before their eyes.



*Figure 9: Photo Effect before Burning*



*Figure 10: Photo Effect Burning*

## Shatter Effect

At the climax of the film, Sam succumbs to the effects of the disease and his mental state collapses around him. To continue the visual representation of Alzheimer's through the course of the film, I wanted to give this moment as much impact as possible. I created a glass shattering effect in After Effects to use as a background and transition when Sam is hiding in his closet from his



granddaughter. He collapses on to the ground, holding his head in pain and confusion. The wall shatters around him, revealing the broken, colorless world of his mind. This effect worked to break down the darkness of the once physical world that Sam was a part of and left him to the completely imaginary world of colorless 3D.

Over the course of the film, Sam struggles with his grasp on reality, by flickering back and forth between 3D and live action. The shatter effect pushed this idea one step further by breaking down the imaginary 3D world that Sam was struggling to function in and reveal itself for what it truly was, the complete destruction of his mental state.



*Figure 11: Final Shatter Effect*

## *Music/Sound Mixing*

I worked with a composer to collaborate on my film towards the beginning of production on *Her Eyes*. However, with the filming delay and other unexpected events that came up, there was a long stretch in time where there was no contact between us. I reached out to my composer again in February of 2016 to find out that he had forgotten about the project completely and refused to give me a proper response back. This forced me to fall back on my temporary music that I had used previously.

I used the temp music for almost a full year without any hope of finding a new composer to replace the one I had lost contact with. This was when one of my thesis advisors Cat Ashworth, recommended that I reach out to Dr. Jonathan H. Kruger, a professor and the Chair of the Department of Performing Arts and Visual Culture at RIT. He had a great reputation and had studied and graduated with a PhD from the Eastman School of Music. It was through my connection with Cat that I was able to meet with Dr. Kruger and his assistant Ryan Gaynor to discuss the development of my film and their involvement.

To my pleasant surprise, Dr. Kruger wanted no compensation for composing for my film. His intentions were to develop a relationship with the School of Film and Animation and the RIT Music Program through participating and lending his skills to students looking for composers. His thinking was that by aiding students his department would gain reputation and recognition for their work so that he could facilitate the collaboration between the two departments.

I met with my new composers in March of 2017 and very quickly found that the three of us were on the exact same page when it came to the score of my film. Dr. Kruger took the temp music that I had and expanded upon the idea. Using the same key and notes, he rewrote the entire score to create a theme for the film, filling in the awkward and empty spaces that I had left before with the beautiful tones of pianos, cellos, violins, and synths. After meeting with them again, we discussed the development of my sound design. At the time, I had planned on using my friend Vicky, who recorded the dialogue on set to mix my sound, but time was getting close. I took the rough dialogue and sound design and passed it to Dr. Kruger's assistant Ryan to help adjust the levels for the final mix.

Ryan and I spent the wee hours of the night before the deadline tirelessly working and reworking the timing for the music and sound effects to match the intensity of the film and the scenes. Working side by side with these two talented and gifted musicians opened my eyes to the wonders of having music composed for my film. Before this experience, I had always done my own sound and had used copyright free music I found offline. Looking at the film before their involvement and after, there is a wonderful and distinct difference between the careful consideration and musical talent of a composer working for a film and using the subpar copyright free music I had been working with before. I believe that Ryan and Dr. Kruger's edit gave a greater sense of continuity and helped develop the intricate meanings and relationship of the visuals throughout the film. If given another chance, I would love to work on a project with the RIT Music Program and especially Ryan and Dr. Kruger again.

## Public Release/Reaction

The initial completion of *Her Eyes* was Friday May 12<sup>th</sup> 2017 and the premier of the work at the School of Film and Animation screenings graduate day was Sunday May 14<sup>th</sup> 2017.

As I walked down to the podium, I was having trouble keeping my tears from falling. Two years of my life had gone into this film, and all of the grief and frustrations that I had from my grandfathers' diagnosis had just played on the screen before me. It was too much to handle all at once. I took mental notes of all of the reactions of the audience but for the most part, I was wrapped in my own head about how I got to be standing in front of my peers without completely fainting from the anxiety and stress of the whole thing.

The film screened without too much trouble, I noticed a drop frame and that my title popped off screen but the biggest frustration was that my sound was off 4 frames. My composers had mentioned this mishap to me Friday morning after I had completely submitted the film for screenings but unfortunately, I was unable to replace the file before the final deadline. Ironically, many viewers in the audience found this to be intentional and wished that the sound sync had been pushed even more to represent the characters' decline in an auditory sense.

The biggest complaint of the film came from the sound mix and overall levels. The dialogue was mixed too low for the auditorium and the music played louder than everything else. It wasn't detrimental to the screening but something that could have been caught with careful attention to the sound levels.

Overall, the reception of *Her Eyes* was positive, but mixed. Many enjoyed the film the way it was, and others wished that the animation had been distorted more to match the glitch effect in the live action. There was discussion of the balance between the live action and the animated segments and how these could have been improved but one thing rang true, most people wished that the distortion had been pushed towards one extreme or another. I know that these comments are subjective but it is nice to know that the audience connected with the distortion and the animation effects and the ideas behind them.

## **Conclusion/Experience**

As an artist and filmmaker *Her Eyes* became an extension and expression of the years of frustration and guilt surrounding my grandfather, his diagnosis, and passing. At the same time, this film was an opportunity to place my grief in a more positive outlet to allow myself to properly heal and accept the hard truths that came with his death. I created a film that I felt that anyone going through a similar situation could reflect and relate with. I hope that maybe they could bring their own personal experiences and griefs to the film and find solace from within its story and ultimately some level of healing and appreciation for those affected with similar diseases in their lives.

This film production was an epic journey in itself. I planned to create something new and expand my skillset through the process of creating this film. At the end of the process, I was left with a film that meant more to me and my healing

process than what I had set out to do. Though this film isn't perfect, it gave me the confidence and strength to know that I could overcome any number of obstacles and frustrations that I come across in the future.

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## Appendix A – Original Approved Thesis Proposal

# Animation Thesis Proposal

“Her  
Eyes” By  
Stephanie  
Clark

MFA Thesis Proposal School of  
Film and Animation Rochester  
Institute of Technology  
Rochester, New York

April 3rd,  
2015

Proposal approved for submission by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

“Her Eyes” 8-10 minute Animation/Live Action

**Logline:** The struggles of a young woman and her grandfather dying of Alzheimer’s disease.

**Treatment:**

OPENING SCENE - LIVE ACTION

GEORGE a man in his late 50’s sits in a large sofa reading a book under the light of a lamp. He wears glasses and an old sweater. He smiles quietly to himself while reading. A young girl, Molly, walks into the room texting on her phone. She trips over a piece of furniture but recovers quickly. She sees her grandfather chuckling at her follies. The girl plops down next to her grandfather and grabs his glasses and puts them on her face, saying that he should laugh at her trip since he is blinder than she is. He quietly takes the glasses off the girl’s face and tells her that she should stay away from his glasses so that they don’t ruin her pretty eyes. She scoffs at his comment and rolls her eyes. He calls her Sally, her mother’s name. Molly brushes off the comment telling him that he’s a silly grandpa and that he knows her name is Molly. She gets off the couch and trots off to bed. George puts his book down, and walks after the girl. Shortly after, Molly runs out into the room and mutters to herself that he forgot to turn the lights off as she pulls the chain on the lamp.

ANIMATION

George is sitting in an office watching a conversation between Molly, her grandmother CLARE, and a doctor. Words flutter around the air in front of George’s face. (Literally- key words of the conversation will be floating in space around George’s face as he tries to keep up with the conversation) He looks distracted. He looks around the room muttering things to himself. He looks at the doctor and then at his family. Their shapes are similar but their faces are blurry. He stares intently at Molly’s face. She glances at him, her once bright eyes look dull in the light. The surrounding environment fades away into nothingness but still George’s eyes are fixated on Molly’s eyes. Her eyes blink and fade away. George looks around the area. He’s sitting



in a white room with faint black lines defining the objects in the room. He blinks and is suddenly sitting in the office again with the doctor staring at him. "Do you understand what I'm saying?" George nods and stares off in the distance. In front of him the animated room begins to repeat in what looks like a holographic haze, unable to be seen to the other people in the room. Molly looks at her grandfather and begins to tear up. She rushes out of the room. George watches her leave and mutters to himself as the door closes.

#### LIVE ACTION - WITH ANIMATED EFFECTS

George is putting away dishes. The sink in the background is filling with water and suds. George continues his routines but begins to put dishes in the wrong spot: the casserole dish in the oven, the mugs in the microwave, etc. Eventually, he fills a mug with soapy water and puts it into the microwave. He sets the timer and sits at the table and grabs a newspaper. Suddenly, the water begins to overflow from the sink and the timer on the microwave goes off. George lurches from the table to grab his mug from the microwave but steps in the water from the sink. He grabs the mug and turns to turn off the sink. He slips on the water and tosses the mug in the air. He collapses on the floor and the mug falls next to him, shattering and splattering hot water all over him. Molly runs into the kitchen, she's older now, in her mid-teens. She looks over the mess that her grandfather has made and shakes her head. She helps him up off the ground and sits him at the table. She throws a kitchen towel on the floor, turns off the water, and leans out of the room. "He's done it again." She looks back into the room at her grandfather who proceeds to read the newspaper.

#### MEMORY - ANIMATION

Molly beckons her grandpa to follow her down a dirt path surrounded by trees. He begs her to slow down, struggling to keep up with her pace. She runs off ahead of him, disappearing into the thicket. He rests for a while before chasing after the girl. He motions behind him and grabs the hand of a young woman, his wife CLARE. She grabs his hand, smiling gently; she begins to open her mouth. Suddenly, blood splatters on George's face. He trips, sweating profusely, landing on his knees. He gets up, calling out to his wife. He looks

frantically down the dirt path where she once stood. He turns around, he chases down the path into nothingness calling out to his granddaughter. The background fades away to reveal that George is walking down a small road, no shoes no jacket. Looking for his family.

## LIVE ACTION

The light from a cell phone casts light in a dark room. It rings a few times before Molly grabs it. She answers it, still sleeping. Suddenly her eyes shoot wide open and she bursts from the sheets, grabs a coat and runs off.

She paces around a small room. George is sitting by himself on a small couch in a daze. She kneels down in front of him and grabs his shoulders. "Why? What were you doing out there?" George looks confused but his confusion soon turns to anger. "I was looking for my family!" Molly's grip loosens as she slumps to the floor, shocked. She regains herself in a fit of rage. "They're gone! They're ALL GONE! I'm STUCK WITH YOU!" George yells at her, saying that she doesn't know anything about him; that he's never met her before. Molly runs out of the room and comes back in a flash. She shoves a photo in George's face. She hands it over to him and begins to sob. George looks over the photo, his face softens into a small frown. He puts his hand on Molly's head and pats it gently. He mutters an apology and holds her face in his hands. He says that no one with such pretty eyes should ever have to cry. She smiles and wipes her tears. She begins to speak but no words come out.

## ANIMATION

George looks over Molly's face. Her face is blurred out but her bright eyes remain the only defining feature. He watches her lips as they move. He studies them as Molly's face morphs into her younger self. Bits and pieces of her voice breaks through the noise and George looks around. The objects in the room start to change and shift into older versions. The worn out rug, the arms on the couch all seem to travel back in time to when they were once new. The forms and colors shift through this experience, losing the essence of their original forms. He looks back at Molly. Words buzz around her face like flies, obscuring his vision and distracting him. His vision starts to fade as

the world closes into darkness. Molly's voice reaches through the noise as she calls out to him.

## LIVE ACTION

George awakens in a bed in a hospice. Molly has fallen asleep next to him while holding his hand. He reaches over and pats her head. She suddenly lifts her head. She asks him how he is and if he knows where he is. He nods and says he's back in his living room. After a short conversation, George recognizes some brief pieces of his granddaughter. These small thoughts and ideas float around the air as words and small phrases. Molly begins to cry softly into his shoulder and hugs him tightly. He holds her hand and tells her that her eyes are too pretty to cry. She smiles and lifts her head up to look at her grandfather's face. He exhales softly and closes his eyes and smiles. Molly perks up and grabs his shoulders. She shakes him and call out his name; nothing. He's gone. Tears well up in her eyes as she lays her head down on his chest and holds his hand. The world that she once knew starts to break until the entire scene fades to white with thin drawn lines of a moving hold. These lines then distort and turn into the title.

## **Rationale:**

Alzheimer's disease is something that many people face every day. From the families of loved ones, to doctors and nurses, to the person dying of the disease themselves, Alzheimer's is a struggle for all involved even past a person's last breath. My very own grandfather has been fighting this disease for some years and is getting close to his final years of the struggle.

Doctors and nurses have described exactly what will happen to each patient as the disease progresses. There are variations in how their behavior changes and memories fade but I wanted to know what happened behind the surface. I want to explore how someone with Alzheimer's feels, sees things, thinks about the world and how that differs from the loved ones involved in the care and daily life of someone with this disease.

My film will give a firsthand account of the stages of Alzheimer's disease through memories and events between a grandfather and his I will go beneath the surface, use animation and film to create the symptoms on screen so that the audience may walk away with an

understanding of how the symptoms look for someone who has the disease. At the same time, I will show the struggles of a caretaker, someone whose life is constantly on call for their loved one with the disease.

### **Visuals:**

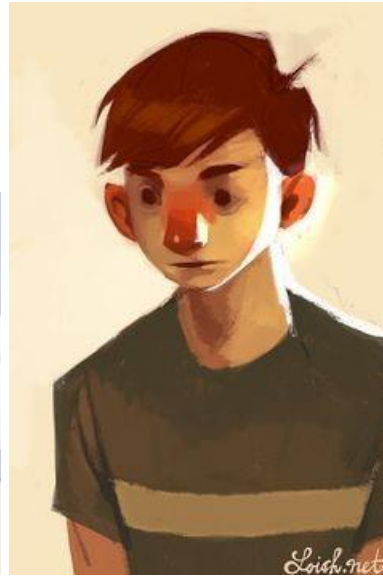
For this film, I will be using live action and animation (2D/3D) to break the film into reality, memories, and broken memories or memories that are in the process of being forgotten. Live action will ground the film in reality, 3D animation will represent the most vivid memories, and 2D animation will represent those memories that are being lost or distorted.

The 3D animation will use simple and stylized character designs. This will allow my animation to exist independently from the live action and make room for more creative choices rather than focus on photo realism to perfectly match the scenes from the live action sequences. The animation will be overlaid on top of the live action in instances where the two worlds exist at the same time.

*Inspiration from “Her”*

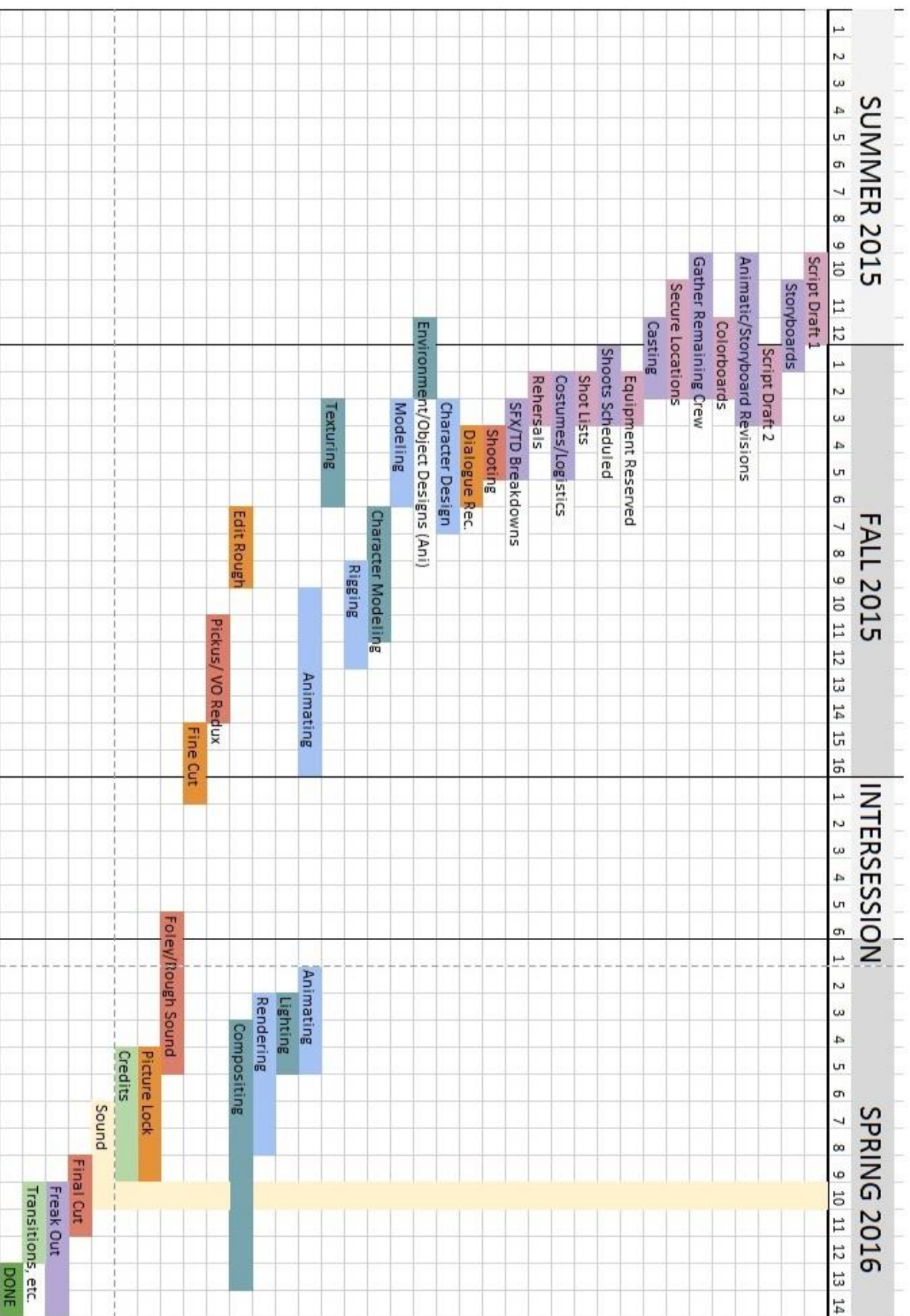


## Other Inspirations



Title: Her Eyes		Director: Stephanie Clark		
Days Shooting: 2.5		Running Time:	8 minutes	
	Quantity	Fee	Subtotal	Acct. Total
100 Story				
Story and Script	Self Provided			
200 Talent				200
Producer	1	0	0	
Director	1	0	0	
Lead Actors	2	100	200	
Extras/Misc Character	2	0	0	
300 Production Personnel				0
Director of Photograp	1	0	0	
Gaffer	1	0	0	
Grip	2	0	0	
Sound Mixer	1	0	0	
Boom Op	1	0	0	
400 Travel and Locations				550
Cast and Crew meals	4	100	400	
Location Fees	0	0	0	
Equipment Cartage	0	0	0	
Miscellaneous Expense		150	150	
500 Production Equipment				450
Camera and Support	SOF	0	0	
Media - SSDs for BMC	Self Provided	0	0	
Lighting	CAG	0	0	
Grip	CAG	0	0	
Sound Package	CAG	0	0	
Insurance		200	200	
Auto Rigger		100	100	
Plugins/Special Software		150	150	
600 Art Direction				200
Props		200	200	
700 Sound and Music				150
Composer		150	150	
Sound Mixer	Student	0	0	
800 Editing and Finishing				150
Editor	Student	0	0	
Hard Drives	2	75	150	
Color Correction	Self Provided	0	0	
900 Office & Supplies				400
Shipping/Postage		100	100	
Blue-Ray/DVD		50	50	
Festival Fees		150	150	
Batteries		100	100	

Total    \$2,100.00





## Appendix B – *Her Eyes* Script

INT. MASTER BEDROOM (LIVE ACTION)

Close on HELEN Peterson's eyes (20's). We slowly zoom out to reveal her face (still close). She's looking at something off camera.

CUT TO MASTER SHOT OF THE ROOM.

Helen is sitting at the end of a bed. A man lay sleeping in the bed. She takes his hand into hers. She puts his hand down slowly, savoring the moment before picking up her mug from the table.

HELEN (CONTD) Its cold.

The words are shown on screen and dissolve into a misty trail that flies off screen.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. DOCTORS OFFICE (3D ANIMATION)

Muffled ruffling noises are heard in the darkness. Then a high pitched noise/ringing (like recovering from shell-shock)

DR. DIOTA

I believe you are in the early stages of Alzheimer's Disease.

Tilt down to a close up of SAM Peterson's face (late 60's) the 3D model. Indistinguishable words are floating around his head. The doctor speaking to him utters words that echo from his mouth, the words themselves dissolve into smokey images that dissipate when they get close to Sam.

DR. DIOTA Mr.

Peterson?

Sam's head perks up from the noise as if being woken from a sudden nap.

SAM

Huh? Yeah, yeah...

Dr Diota keeps talking but we hear no sound. Instead words are spit from his mouth that dissipate into smoke and images in front of Sam's face as he talks about the stages of the disease. Sam rubs his face and tilts his head back and closes his eyes.

SAM

This isn't happening...

INT. APARTMENT - DAY LIVE ACTION

(same angle as previous shot) Sam sits on the couch staring at the ceiling. (At this point he is still the 3D model) The mist surrounds his eyes and words that form small clouds hover above him causing the word "Helen" (formed in the shape of raindrops) to rain on his face.

Helen walks into the room. Her silhouette passes by Sam's figure. As she passes her figure reveals the live action actor. The mist and rain still hovers over his head.

The mist and raindrops around Sam are pushed aside and disintegrate as they fall. Sam regains his poise. (the conversation is acted out but not heard)

SAM

How was your day?

HELEN

Eh, fine. How are you?

Helen walks into the kitchen. She comes back with two mugs. She hands one to Sam. Sam Stares into his mug, lost. Sam's body begins to flicker back and forth between the 3D model and live action.

HELEN

Papa? Papa, whats wrong?

Helen grabs the paperwork and flips through them. The camera pans through the pamphlets. The camera pauses on the date.

She pauses for a moment and looks at Sam. They briefly lock eyes before she looks through the paperwork again.

HELEN

No... Its not fair.

INT. APARTMENT 1 YEAR LATER (LIVE ACTION)

Helen is laying out Sam's clothes on the bed. She finds a loose sticky note on the floor and sticks it back on the wall where it was. The camera pans around the room to see sticky notes everywhere. She peaks her head into the hallway and listens. After a few moments she bursts from the room in a panic and runs into the kitchen.

Sam is sitting at the table working on something. He turns around with a big grin on his face. Sam's figure flickers between 3D and live action as he turns to face her. His body settles back into live action once he makes eye contact with Helen.

He holds up a spatula and pan. He has been scraping the nonstick coating off of the pan. She takes the pan, and hugs him. She leaves the room, holding the pan to her chest.

Sam gets up from the table and peaks around the corner to look at Helen. He looks over at the shredded pieces of the pan. The high pitched ringing noise comes back.

INT. LIVING ROOM 1 YEAR LATER (LIVE ACTION)

Fade into POV shot of Helen's face as she is shouting. Her words are muffled sounding.

Helen and Sam are fighting over the collection of pills he has been hiding from Helen in a photobox.

Helen holds the box in her hands and shakes it at Sam. He tries to grab it from her. In a quick movement, Sam pulls the box from her hands but ends up spilling its contents onto the floor.

The sticky notes Sam had attached to the box and pill bottle flutter to the ground. The ringing noise dissipates as the sound effects/dialogue come back.

Both of them try to pick up the contents. Helen picks up the bottle first.

HELEN

Please... please don't leave me. Please.

SAM

I don't know anything... I don't remember anything... how can that be called a life, when I don't even get to enjoy it?

HELEN

It'll be okay...

Sam stands up and offers her a hand. Helen picks up the rest of the box, hands it to him and takes a deep breath.

HELEN Okay...

INT. UNKNOWN PLACE (ANIMATION)

Sam sits on his couch in darkness. He takes a deep breath and opens his eyes. After a few blinks he looks around the room, unsure of where he is. He walks around the couch. He traces his fingers along the bookcase on his right, as if trying to place who's it was by touching it. He turns into the kitchen, looking shocked. He rushes through the kitchen and opens the door to the apartment hallway.

SAM V.O.

I am no longer the man I once was...

SAM

Where are you?

He closes the door behind him and uses anything and everything in front of him to block the door.

SAM V.O.

I haven't been... for a very long time now.

Sam runs down a long stretched hallway. He looks in the bathroom.

SAM V.O.

Almost five years...

He looks in the shower. In the master bedroom. In the closet.

SAM V.O.

And I don't remember a damn thing.

SAM Answer me!

SAM V.O.

He starts pulling random objects out from the closet and throwing them behind him. The ironing board, the cleaning supplies, etc.

SAM Where are

you!?

SAM V.O.

I can't... I can't do this anymore.

Sam turns to hear banging noises from down the hall. He runs from the noises and hides in the closet, closing the bi-fold doors behind him.

HELEN

Papa? What's going on? Are you okay?

SAM V.O.

My family.... Hel... She... she doesn't deserve this.

The front door opens but the chain keeps the disembodied voice from getting in.

HELEN

Papa? Papa! Open the door!

Sam is still hiding in the closet. He covers his ears and closes his eyes.

SAM V.O.

No one should remember me like this...

HELEN

Open the door!! Papa! Open the door!

Cut to Sam sitting in a computer chair talking to a camera, his body flickering between 3D and live action.

SAM

(to camera) I just want my little girl to live her life the way she wants. Go to college, have her own family... Ya, know?

The front door bursts open. The sound of jingling keys and footsteps fills the space.

HELEN

Papa? Where are you? Papa?

OFFICER He's in here!

Cut to close up of Sam's face as he opens his eyes. Sam's body flickers from 3D to Live Action.

HELEN

Papa! Thank God. I thought something happened to you!

Helen hugs Sam tightly. His expression is distant but slowly melts from confusion to relief.

SAM

I don't know where I am...

HELEN

Papa, its okay. I'm here now. We're safe.

Cut back to Sam talking to the camera.

SAM

I just want her to be happy.

Cut back to Helen and Sam in the closet.

SAM

I can't... I don't...

HELEN

Com'on... Let's get you out of here.

SAM

I don't want to do this anymore.

Cut back to Sam talking to camera.

SAM Helen,

Cut to black.

SAM V.O.

I love you.

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON LIVE ACTION

Fade in to shot. Sam is sitting on the edge of the bed finishing off a glass of water. He looks around the room. It is decorated with sticky notes and photos of the past few years. He tucks himself in and continues to look around the room. His body flickers back and forth between 3D and live action. Helen is standing outside the room trying not to cry. She takes a deep breath and sits down on the bed next to him placing her mug on the end table next to the empty glass.

SAM

Why are you crying? We had some good times today...

HELEN Yeah... we did.

HELEN

Do you remember the day you got me that big rocking horse for my birthday. Ha ha, I stayed on that thing so long I fell asleep on it.

SAM You did?

HELEN

Yeah. And this one time on mother's day at school you dressed in one of grandma's old dresses and came to school.

SAM

Wow, I did that?

HELEN Yep!

SAM

I must be a good dad.

HELEN

Papa, I'm your granddaughter. Remember? I'm Helen.

SAM

I know, I know, silly. But you know how I know you're my granddaughter?

HELEN How?

SAM

Your eyes. You have the prettiest eyes.

HELEN Thank you.

SAM

You know, you remind me of someone.

HELEN Do I?

SAM Yeah...

He finally stops flickering between the two mediums and remains live action.

Helen smiles gently and sits up. In the background we hear soft breathing noises. Helen turns to face Sam. The breathing sounds stop.

Helen picks up her mug from the end table.

HELEN Its cold.

She looks back at Sam for a brief moment, reminiscing for a thought, before walking out of the room. The sounds of a phone being dialed are heard in the distance.

## Appendix C – *Her Eyes* Film Stills



*Figure 13: Sam Running from the Monster*



*Figure 12: Sam and Helen*



*Figure 22: Sam telling Helen his diagnosis*



*Figure 16: Sam sitting in his broken mindspace*



# HER EYES

A still from the film 'Her Eyes'. The scene is dimly lit, focusing on a wooden surface. A pair of dark-rimmed glasses with clear lenses lies on the surface. To the right, a tall, clear glass is partially filled with water. In the foreground, the spine of a thick book is visible, slightly out of focus. The title 'HER EYES' is overlaid in a large, white, sans-serif font in the upper left quadrant.

*Figure 23: Title as Seen in the Film*

# HER EYES

A FILM BY  
**STEPHANIE CLARK**

*Figure 24: Credit Title*



SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MFA DEGREE IN THE  
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION,  
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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*Figure 35: Final Credit and Copyright*